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Orlando Health Partners with Heart of Florida United Way to Diminish Negative Health Consequences for Youth through Broadened Awareness of the Earned Income Tax Credit

Coalition of community organizations formed to expand awareness of and access to the tax credit

ORLANDO, Fla. (January 28, 2021) – In an effort to prevent Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Orlando Health has partnered with Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) to implement a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In an ongoing effort to improve youth health and wellbeing, the program’s goal is to improve financial stability of qualified families by helping them claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Orlando Health has also pulled together a coalition of community organizations to expand the awareness of and access to the EITC to impact as many qualified residents as possible.

“We know that children who experience trauma have an increased risk of developing chronic health conditions,” said Lainie Fox Ackerman, assistant vice president of External Affairs & Community Benefit, Orlando Health. “Economic and financial interventions can be effective in preventing hardships and other conditions that put families at a greater risk for trauma. This partnership with Heart of Florida United Way, in addition to existing outreach and education programming and resources, will help to increase both the awareness and access to the EITC for low-income working families in Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties.”

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is the term given to describe all types of abuse, neglect, and other traumatic experiences that occur for individuals under the age of 18. The landmark CDC-Kaiser ACE Study examined the relationships between these experiences during childhood and health and well-being later in life. Childhood trauma greatly increases the risk for at least five out of 10 of the leading causes of death in the U.S. Almost two-thirds of the 17,000 U.S. adults surveyed reported at least one Adverse Childhood Experience and 12.5 percent of adults experienced four or more. When compared to adults who experienced no ACES, adults who experienced four or more ACEs had significantly higher odds of developing heart disease, COPD, stroke, alcoholism, depression and other poor health outcomes.

(more)
“Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences before they happen, especially for children disproportionately at-risk, is imperative to the health of our community,” continued Fox Ackerman. “If we can help residents build safe, stable and nurturing relationships – and environments – we will see a positive impact on a broad range of health issues and on the development of skills that will allow children to reach their full potential.”

The Earned Income Tax Credit

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is attributed to lifting more children out of poverty than any other federal program. It helps qualified families and individuals reduce debt, pay their rent/mortgage, repair cars – or use in any way they see fit. It also provides a significant boost to the Central Florida economy, where more than $5.4 million in refunds were distributed in 2017 (the most current reporting period available) alone throughout Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties.

To qualify for EITC, recipients must have earned income at any time in 2020 and meet the guidelines for maximum income. In some cases, people may be able to claim up to $20,000 by re-filing tax returns for the past three years.

Among other qualifying factors, 2020 income cannot exceed:

- $15,820 with no qualifying children ($21,710 if married and filing jointly)
- $41,756 with one qualifying child ($47,646 if married and filing jointly)
- $47,440 with two qualifying children ($53,330 if married and filing jointly)
- $50,954 with three or more qualifying children ($56,844 if married and filing jointly)

The Internal Revenue Service estimates that 15-20 percent of qualified residents failed to claim EITC due to lack of awareness. With hundreds of thousands of Central Floridians eligible for the credit, the economic impact on individual lives and on the community is tremendous.

“Even before the pandemic, children in the United States experienced poverty at a 54 percent higher rate than adults, while poverty rates for children of color are nearly three times that of white children,” said Jeff Hayward, Heart of Florida United Way President and CEO. “The outreach and education activities delivered to at-risk families in the tri-county area has the potential for long-term benefits to the future health and well-being of children living in Central Florida, and of the community at-large.”

“Pre-pandemic, nearly half of our hardworking residents struggled to make ends meet,” continued Hayward. “The ALICE – the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed – population were one paycheck away from financial ruin. More than 350,000 residents in the tri-county area lived in continuous fear of an unexpected bill that may extend them beyond their already tight budgets. This increases the overall stress in a home, which impacts an entire family’s mental and physical well-being – present and future.”

Community Coalition

HFUW will continue its EITC outreach efforts while also working with Orlando Health partners to train staff on communicating EITC to their beneficiaries. Orlando Health’s Community Benefit (more)
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and Foundation teams have initiated Project SCORES (Supporting Children’s Outcomes and Restoring Economic Security) to establish a coalition of community organizations to expand knowledge about and access to the EITC. The initial project partners include the Seminole County Department of Health, 4C – Community Coordinated Care for Children, Shepherd’s Hope, Grace Medical and the Healthcare Center for the Homeless (with more to come over the next three years of the grant). In an effort to assess the success of this initiative, the University of Central Florida has partnered with Orlando Health to lead an evaluation to measure the project’s impact on the community.


About Heart of Florida United Way
Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) is Central Florida’s most comprehensive health and human services charity and the largest provider of funds to the region’s most critical health and human service programs. In 2018-19, it raised and managed more than $22.4 million in total resources, including $16.6 million raised for the Community Fund that invests in dozens of vitally important programs in the community throughout Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties. HFUW fights for the health, education and financial stability of every person in Central Florida. It operates United Way 2-1-1, Central Florida’s information and assistance, crisis, suicide and referral helpline; Volunteer Resource Center and the Ryan White program, which administers nearly $3.2 million to provide HIV/AIDS services and referrals. HFUW impacts more than 400,000 individuals annually through its direct service and funded programs. United Way partners with local businesses, government, other charities to increase awareness of local health and human service issues and to inspire hope, provide options and create possibilities for people in need. Visit www.HFUW.org for more information, or call (407) 835-0900. Follow us on Facebook at Heart of Florida United Way and on Twitter and Instagram @hfuw.

About Orlando Health
Orlando Health, headquartered in Orlando, Florida, is a not-for-profit healthcare organization with $6.8 billion of assets under management that serves the southeastern United States. Founded more than 100 years ago, the healthcare system is recognized around the world for its pediatric and adult Level One Trauma program as well as the only state-accredited Level Two Adult Trauma Center in Pinellas County. It is the home of the nation’s largest neonatal intensive care unit under one roof, the only system in the southeast to offer open fetal surgery to repair the most severe forms of spina bifida, the site of an Olympic athlete training facility and operator of one of the largest and highest performing clinically integrated networks in the region. Orlando Health is a statutory teaching system that pioneers life-changing medical research. The 3,200-bed system includes 15 wholly-owned hospitals and emergency departments; rehabilitation services, cancer and heart institutes, imaging and laboratory services, wound care centers, physician offices for adults and pediatrics, skilled nursing facilities, an in-patient behavioral health facility, home healthcare services in partnership with LHC Group, and urgent care centers in partnership with CareSpot Urgent Care. Nearly 4,200 physicians, representing more than 80 medical specialties and subspecialties have privileges across the Orlando Health system, which employs nearly 22,000 team members. In FY19, Orlando Health served nearly 150,000 inpatients and nearly 2.7 million outpatients. During that same time period, Orlando Health provided more than $760 million in total value to the communities it serves in the form of charity care, community benefit programs and services, community building activities and more. Additional information can be found at http://www.orlandohealth.com.

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